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EDITORIAL

Purge Hits Schools

150 mainly rural Belarusian-language schools - have just been quietly closed.

On the other hand, the events surrounding the sudden closing of perhaps the best secondary school in the country have dominated the news in Minsk this summer.

The Jakub Kolas Humanities Lyceum was officially closed at the end of June after a month-long conflict between the authorities and the school. The Lyceum was founded during the break-up of the Soviet Union as a private institution intent on overcoming many decades of russification and of Soviet communist indoctrination. It became an exclusively Belarusian-language public school shortly after independence, and over the years has gained an outstanding educational reputation.

In 1995, during the first year of Lukashenka's presidency, the initial attempt to shackle this uniquely democratic institution failed, and as a result summer-long protests by the students, their parents, and the teachers produced a compromise. The principal and the founder of the school, Uladzimir Kolas agreed to a demotion to an acting principal position, with the principal's position having been left open.

Then, in May of this year, during final exams, after years of steady harassment, the regime struck again. At first it appointed an obviously unqualified principal, discharging Kolas. This step was followed by a variety of state inspections, and finally the school building was closed, ostensibly for repairs. No significant repairs were undertaken, and the Lyceum was officially closed on June 27, with a plan to disperse the students among various Russian or mixed-language schools in Minsk.

The parents and the faculty, with total active support by the student body, resolved to keep the Lyceum functioning, even while temporarily without any facility. In the first days of September, instruction for over 120 students literally took place on the street. The parents' committee appealed to the local population, the Western institutions, and the Belarusian diaspora to help the Lyceum to survive. **In order to survive, the Lyceum needs an adequate, albeit temporary, facility; financial support to maintain it as a private institution; and the retention of its accreditation, in order to allow the graduates to enter university.**

Let us review some possible solutions to this three-fold problem:

Facility - To secure a large enough single facility in Minsk may not be possible in the current authoritarian environment. But, if the 120-150 students were to be split up by the school's four grades, they could be accommodated in local private facilities, in international institutions in Minsk, even in church buildings. Or as a tangible demonstration of support for educational freedom, four foreign embassies could find the space to temporarily accommodate classes of 30-35 students each

Financial support - The combination of private and governmental grants, contributions from the local population, as well as from the Belarusian diaspora, could keep the Lyceum operational, at least this year. This would allow time for finding a more permanent solution.

Accreditation - In the past, Lyceum graduates had no difficulty in entering either local or foreign universities. They need assurances that the current disruption will not deny them admission. To that end, private institutions, such as the European Humanities University in Minsk, and other European and Western universities should keep their doors open to Lyceum's graduates.

The Jakub Kolas Humanities Lyceum has stood its ground in defense of academic freedom. It may be up to all of us - Western governments and aid agencies, and the Belarusian diaspora - to join in the struggle to ensure the Lyceum's survival.

Walter Stankievich

From the Publisher

In this issue you will find articles by **new authors** Eric Chenoweth, Siarhei Krycheuski, Andrew Ryder and Anna Brzozowska. We are continuing to search for diverse authors who will publish original material, while not leaving out valuable articles reprinted with the kind permission of RFE/RL, IWPR and others.

Our search for outside financial support that would allow us to publish more frequently, and to have greater outreach, have not produced results so far. Nevertheless, Belarusian Review has participated in such important efforts, as the promotion of the Belarus Democracy Act of 2003, and frequent contacts with legislators and government officials with view of securing democracy, the respect for media freedom and for human rights in Belarus. To a large degree such activity is made possible by contributions of many of our subscribers. The following were **especially generous this year**: Anatol Lukjanczuk, Alice Kipel, Thomas Bird, Kola Romano, George and Lorraine Kipel, Nicholas Sniezko, Uladzimier Nabagiez, Olga Wilson and Alla Orsa-Romano, with the list remaining open for future contributors to be mentioned in the next issue.

On the down side, a significant number of our regulars have so far neglected to **renew their subscriptions**. We urge you to do so upon receiving this issue, and to go beyond your own subscription by spreading the word in your circles. Such a cooperative effort by all of us can guarantee not only the continued publication of Belarusian Review, but its future growth as well.

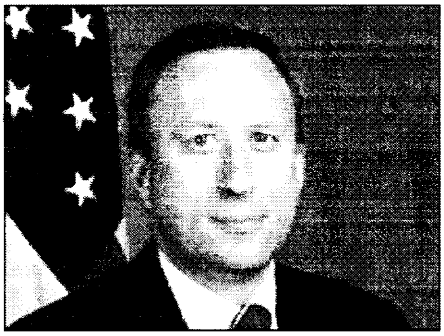
FEATURES

George Krol, New U.S. Ambassador to Belarus

By Joe Arciuch

We would like to congratulate Ambassador Krol on his becoming the fifth U.S. Ambassador to Belarus, and wish him well. The ambassador arrived in Miensk September 3. Upon landing, he addressed the waiting journalists with a short speech in Belarusian. He mentioned he was in Miensk in 1992 to help establish diplomatic relations between the U.S. and Belarus and then worked for over a year as deputy head of the embassy. "I am very pleased now to return to Belarus, the country where kind and hard-working people live," he said. "My main objective is to build and develop good relations between American and Belarusian people. . . . I very much hope to learn more about your beautiful country."

Krol's assignment coincides with the critical challenge Belarus is facing whether it is going to survive as an independent and sovereign state if it goes through with the integration with Russia. With respect to this subject, the U.S. position — set in 1996 and maintained to this date — has been that the U.S. was not in favor of a political union between Belarus and Russia, that a treaty must conform to international standards, an integration should be undertaken with the complete consent of each party, it should be of benefit to each party and be outward looking.



Ambassador George Krol

Ambassador Michael Kozak, on the eve of his departure from Miensk, put it this way: "If Belarus 'had a democratically elected parliament, president, and an open public debate about relations with Russia' [the U.S.] would have to respect the outcome of that decision on the part of the Belarusian people." From this one can draw a conclusion that as long as the president and the parliament remain unrecognized by the world community as legitimate government institutions due to flawed elections, the integration would be considered illegal under the international law.

In December 1994, the U.S, the U.K, Russia and Belarus signed a memorandum of security assurances at the OSCE summit in Budapest in which the signatories reaffirmed their commitment to respect the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Belarus. Shortly after that, two of the signatories, Presidents Lukashenka and Yeltsin, decided to create a Russia-Belarus union.

The Belarusian American community saw the union as an attempt by Russia to reabsorb Belarus, and alarmed by the prospect, the community leadership sought contact with the Department of State. A group of five community leaders (this writer included) was formed. The first meeting took place in October 1994 with James Collins, Ambassador-at-large and Advisor to the Secretary for the New Independent States. A year later, Ambassador Collins visited Belarus where he met with President Lukashenka and his cabinet members as well as other Belarusian leaders. The U.S. relations with Belarus seemed to be on the upswing — but not for long.

In 1996 Lukashenka engineered a rigged referendum. The referendum authorized changes to the Constitution, proposed integration of Belarus with Russia, and extended almost dictatorial powers to the president. Next, the president disbanded the democratically elected parliament and replaced it with his own, handpicked one. Lukashenka turned against the West. The U.S. decided to toughen its stand and went ahead with a series of steps aimed at isolating the regime of Belarus. It is obvious today that this policy played into the hands of Russia, leaving Lukashenka no choice but to become a client of Russia in order to survive.

In 2000, Mr. Putin was elected president of Russia. Putin wanted Belarus to remain under Russian dominance and be integrated with Russia on his, more stringent terms. Mr. Lukashenka wanted economic support from Russia to continue but that his political power remain intact. In this tug of war, Russia has all the winning cards to prevail if left alone to deal with Belarus.

To reengage Belarus, the Department of State has come up with a step-by-step policy. Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Steven Pifer went to Miensk in 2002 to sell the concept. The Belarusian government wouldn't bite. (There must be some hesitancy about who is to take the first step.)

There were some local rumors that it might be easier to deal with the ambassador who has worked in Miensk before. But that was the time of euphoria over the independence of Belarus and Lukashenka was then an obscure MP. Today he is viewed in the West as a wily "last dictator of Europe," defying the West, and accountable to nobody.

During the hearing on his confirmation in the U.S. Senate, Ambassador Krol said he would pursue "strong and wide contacts with the Belarusian people, maintain strong U.S. support for the growth of civil society, independent media, and organizations committed to promoting democracy and market economics." He further said, he would inform the Belarusian authorities that the U.S. "offers not isolation but a step-by-step approach to improve relations." In closing, he said that the U.S. and Europe, and especially Belarus' neighbors, including Russia, "cannot allow Belarus to sink into dangerous isolation and poverty."

During Krol's swearing in, U.S. Secretary of State Powell, in his remarks, contrasted Belarus with its neighbors, highlighted Belarus' disappointing record on human rights, and stressed the U.S. Government's commitment "to helping the people of Belarus enjoy the political and economic liberties which they so greatly deserve and to which they so

fervently aspire." He reiterated the U.S. Government's desire to resume productive bilateral relations and said, "We believe in the future of Belarus and we want to see a democratic Belarus take its rightful place within a Europe whole and free."

It would be too risky to draw any definite conclusion from those statements. They appear to imply a cautious, conditional engagement. It would much depend on how Russia would play its hand. To resolve the problem, the United States and the EU need to lean strongly on Russia to drop its plans for the annexation of Belarus. Russia must be reminded to abide by the commitment it made by signing the Budapest 1994 OSCE memorandum. This would give Belarus more time to sort things out and make it possible to build its civil society and develop democracy with help from the West.

Photo by A. Silwanowicz

Krol addressing Belarusian Americans in New Jersey

A footnote: Belarusian American group's periodic meetings, hosted by Ambassador Collins and attended by officials from various government agencies, continued until the end of 1997 when Ambassador Collins left for Moscow to serve as U.S. Ambassador to Russia. From past experience, this writer feels such meetings can be of help to better focus on problems facing Belarus. So, it's very encouraging to see some movement recently made in this direction.

Ambassador George Krol is a career member of the U.S. Senior Foreign Service. He held foreign assignments in Poland, India, the Soviet Union/Russia, Ukraine and Belarus. His Washington assignments included Director of the Office of Russian Affairs and Special Assistant to the Ambassador-at-Large for the New Independent States. A native of New Jersey, he received his Bachelor's degree in History from Harvard University and Bachelor's and Master's degrees in Philosophy, Politics and Economics from Oxford University, England.

He speaks Russian and Polish and now is learning Belarusian. His interests include history, hiking and occasional horseback riding.

IDEE Country Report
Belarus: "Toward a Future Democratic Victory"

*The following is a summary of a country report on Belarus issued by the Institute for Democracy in Eastern Europe in April 2003. The full report (available on IDEE's web site at **www.idee.org** or through e-mail from **idee@idee.org**) provides a description of the civic movement and political opposition in the context of the 2001 presidential elections. What follows is the background, findings, and conclusions of the trip, as well as a personal postscript by Eric Chenoweth, co-director of IDEE.*

Introduction

Eric Chenoweth, co-director of the Institute for Democracy in Eastern Europe (IDEE) in Washington, D.C., and Miljenko Dereta, executive director of Civic Initiatives in Belgrade, traveled to Belarus from July 1–7, 2002 with the following purposes: (1) to help evaluate the Mobilization Campaign as well as other civic initiatives that were organized during the September 2001 presidential elections; (2) to assess the current situation; and (3) to offer assistance in designing future strategy using the support of IDEE'S Centers for Pluralism Network. The delegation had 22 meetings with 55 representatives of thirty different national and local civic organizations, independent media, and political parties in Minsk, Hrodna, Barysau, and Zodzina. While not comprehensive, the trip provided a thorough overview of the political situation in Belarus, the circumstances surrounding the presidential elections, the performance and capacities of the NGO sector and political opposition, and, finally, the challenges facing the civic and political opposition in the period ahead.

Summary

Belarus is one of Europe's last dictatorships. Power is centralized in the hands of a single ruler, Alexander Lukashenka, who has gained almost total power over the executive, legislative, and judicial branches of government. The state's security forces are freely used to repress opposition activities. Information is controlled, with independent media allowed only on the margins. Internet use is widely monitored. The economy is equally controlled by his supporters or by Lukashenka directly. The only serious threat to Lukashenka's power is Russia, whose influence in Belarus is considerable. Recently, Vladimir Putin proposed incorporation of Belarus as a virtual republic of the Russian Federation. Lukashenka opposes this idea since it destroys any lingering ambitions of becoming head of the proposed Union State. For now, the two states continue to negotiate regarding a common currency, the Russian ruble.

Opposition to Lukashenka within Belarus, while generally pro-democratic, is divided. The Belarus Popular Front, led by Vincuk Viacorka, is the strongest opposition party. Begun in 1988, it was the most important force behind achievement of Belarusian independence. Its platform is based on Western liberal values and strongly supports Belarus's membership in NATO and the EU. The United Civic Party, while liberal in its platform, is more oriented toward Russia. Several parties call themselves social demo-

cratic. The Social Democratic Party of Aleksei Karol, and the Women's Party, led by Valentsina Palevikova, merged in 2002 and have since joined with the Social Democratic Party–Hramada led by Stanislau Shushkevich in an umbrella organization. The united platform of these parties identifies strongly with European social democracy. A fourth social democratic party, the Belarus Social Democratic Party–National Hramada led by Mikola Statkevich, is based more on the remnants of the old nomenklatura. Other parties in the so-called "united opposition" include the anti-regime Belarus Communist Party, the Liberal Democrat Party (based on Zhirinovsky's party in Russia), and several other Soviet-era and Russian offshoots; none have any real base in Belarusian society.

There are two main axes of division within the opposition, one between new anti-communist parties and the older nomenklatura-led forces and the second between more pro-independence and pro-Western and more pro-Russian (or accomodationist) orientations. Western embassies and the OSCE have generally attempted to create a "united" opposition that includes all parties, but such efforts, especially in the lead-up to the September 2001 presidential elections, failed. They appear only to have impeded the creation of a more effective common opposition joining together natural coalition partners.

Belarusian civil society is developing only slowly and in the face of many obstacles. In the last five years, however, there has been a large increase in the number of NGOs. The Assembly of Pro-Democratic NGOs of Belarus began with fewer than 100 members in 1998; in the summer of 2000, it had nearly 500; and its 4th Congress in November 2002 raised the number to 650. The core of civil society lies in the independence movement based in Minsk and major western cities like Hrodna, but it has expanded also to become a stronger force in Belarus's eastern regions. The presidential elections in 2001 were held in a completely anti-democratic framework. After boycotting the October 2000 parliamentary elections, the opposition decided to change tactics and to field a single candidate to compete against Lukashenka. The Assembly of Pro-Democratic NGOs of Belarus, at its 3rd Congress in December 2000 decided to organize an independent and non-partisan Mobilization Campaign and Independent Observation Campaign for the elections. However, the opposition parties did not easily agree on a unified candidate. After a complicated and seemingly contradictory process of selection, which many people perceived as the result — at least in part — of interference of foreign embassies, a former nomenklatura official, Uladzimir Hancharyk, was selected just three weeks before the elections. The selection of a septuagenarian chairman of the official trade union confederation dampened the enthusiasm of many democratic activists for both the political and non-partisan civic campaigns. Regardless of the quality, the selection process left little time for an effective campaign. Given a free hand for manipulation and fraud, the regime claimed an overwhelming 76 percent victory for Lukashenka. Independent polls and the observation of monitors and activists, however, indicates that, despite all difficulties, the single opposition candidate obtained as much as 40 percent of the vote. At the very least, Hancharyk's actual vote should have forced a second round of elections.

As for the Mobilization and Observation Campaigns, these succeeded in activating civil society, increasing turnout to an estimated 84 percent, and fielding thousands of monitors at a large percentage of voting precincts (despite the regime's ban on 4,000 monitors registered by the human rights organization Viasna). **Indeed, the disappointing political result as well as the disunity of political parties was contrasted by the unity and effectiveness of the civic movement, which, for the first time, carried out a national campaign that reached a large part of society with pro-democratic and anti-authoritarian messages.**

The period since the elections, however, has been marked by heightened repression in retaliation for the opposition and civic election campaigns. There has also been an understandable decrease in civic activities as well as disillusionment on the part of NGO activists over the disappointing choice of single candidate and the overall disunity of the opposition. The MK and Observation Campaigns nevertheless showed a new capacity for civic organization, reflected in different public initiatives since the presidential elections, such as the Kurapaty campaign, the defense of the sentenced editors of the *Pahonia* and *Rabochy* newspapers, the Citizens' Commission on Conscience opposing the new repressive law on religion, active participation in 2003's spring municipal elections, and many local initiatives.

Most donors and Western representatives have had a different and less positive evaluation of the results of the elections. Their measurement of success seems to have been an unrealistic expectation that the united opposition candidate should win the elections if only because they felt there could not be a break in the last five years' string of democratic successes against authoritarian leaders (Slovakia, Croatia, Serbia). There were active efforts to try to superimpose important elements of the Serbian success, especially in replicating the youth movement Otpor (Resistance), on the Belarus campaign. Western bodies, however lost sight of the specificities that made up each civic and democratic struggle. When Lukashenka was not voted out in these elections, the Belarus campaign was seen as a failure.

Conclusions

- Despite the disastrous outcome of the September 2001 presidential election in Belarus — and the ongoing disunity of opposition forces — **the country's civic movement united to successfully activate a significant part of society, inspire new civic initiatives, and convince people to make their voices heard in the elections.** The Mobilization Campaign established a new generation of support for democratic values and reinforced the commitment of the democratic movement to using peaceful, democratic means to end the Lukashenka dictatorship. The campaign also helped NGOs overcome their insularity and become more outward looking in their activities in the community — a necessary approach for any future democratic success.
- Although international support helped to achieve much of these civic gains, the international community